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Resilience and young people; an evaluation of a youth and community work apprenticeship scheme.

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Abstract

This article reports on an evaluation of an apprenticeship scheme provided by a Youth Centre based in London, UK that serves a community with high levels of multiple deprivation. The apprenticeship scheme aims to recruit young adults who have life experience of disadvantage arising from pressures such as poor school attendance, family disruption, or offending and provide supported employment in youth work, leading to a qualification in youth and community work. Set within a conceptual framework of resilience and trauma the evaluation applied a participatory methodology to explore of why people took up the apprenticeship role and the outcomes they achieved. This revealed strong themes of practical and emotional person centred support in the centre's recruitment and employment of apprentices. These were critical determinants of successful outcomes. Apprentices, although sometimes in crisis, needed to be at a moment in their lives where they were ready to take life changing advantage of this support. This interaction of support and motivation to change revealed personal and structural features of personal and environmental resilience in apprentices adapting to the experience of acute or chronic trauma.

Key words: Youth; apprenticeship; resilience; trauma; adaptation

INTRODUCTION

[need general information about apprenticeship schemes, youth centres or resilience here]

Background to the Youth Centre

The youth centre was established in 1906 and provides clubs and activities for children over the age of six, including children with disabilities. These activities include a range of sports and arts clubs, residential stays and trips. Activities were provided by paid staff and volunteers. One-to-one work with young people and providing a safe environment and opportunities for young people to grow and develop were key features of the centre's work. Through their work with young people, the centre was engaged in a range of contemporary social policy themes including deprivation, school attendance issues, youth crime and health and well-being including sexual health. The centre advocates a child-focused approach to its work delivered through a model comprising three elements:

1. The health and well-being of children,
2. Their positive engagement with communities,
3. Supporting children in and preparing them for education and employment.

A national funding charity is a key stakeholder in the apprentice and young leader's programmes. The Centre had agreed objectives with this funder to develop and train young people through apprenticeship programmes, as well as to continue providing opportunities for accredited awards (including Duke of Edinburgh, AQA awards unit, YAA and CSLA), vocational training course and other youth activities to promote and improve leadership skills, experience and opportunities for young people.

This article focuses specifically on a scheme that aims to encourage fifteen young people to pursue employment and training through an apprenticeship scheme. The authors' evaluation aimed to explore the narratives of people who are, or had been, apprentices alongside the perceptions of staff who worked with them. In particular, this evaluation addressed the following questions:

1. What factors lay behind this apparent success?
2. How might others learn from the approach taken by the Youth Centre and its funders?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The methodology and outcomes analysis discussed in this paper were closely influenced by concepts of resilience explored in this evaluation project and a WUN international project (Buckner, Fisher, Slade, 2015). The body of research and conceptual understandings of resilience have grown in content and meaning since the middle of the 20th century when the term was used by child psychologists to understand and assess vulnerability to trauma (McElwee, 2007). A key issue was why some children and young people might recover from the trauma of child abuse – noting that the concept of recovery is contested in resilience literature – and others did not. Werner and Smith's (1992) exploration of how the process of adaptation might work pointed conceptualisation away from an individualistic one and towards a more systems wide interaction between the individual, their family and community. Thus, resilience could be understood as more than recovery, which might just be the absence of symptoms of trauma, but rather an adaptation to the impact of and aftermath of trauma by the individual within their wider community and cultural context.

Winfield (1994) writing from an education perspective in the USA reinforced the importance of moving from an understanding of resilience that was solely focused on individual's capacity for positive coping and adaptation to adverse circumstances. She underlined the relevance of social interaction with the individual's wider system and the critical relevance of positive or negative interactions (Winfield, 1994). Whilst Winfield (1994) was particularly interested in the effect of such interactions on self-esteem, this understanding conveyed a broader picture of complex processes between the individual and their environment. Resilience and adaptation to trauma could be promoted in an environmental context both by providing support after trauma and measures which would reduce the risk of traumatic events arising. Developing resilience, the capacity to protect oneself from and survive trauma, is for Winfield (1994) a long-term developmental process requiring support and nurturing comprising four processes. Firstly, reducing exposure to risk, secondly preventing a downward spiral of post-trauma behaviour from which an individual might not recover, thirdly developing and maintaining self-esteem and lastly opening up opportunities for the acquisition of skills and social activity. This systems wide conceptualisation suggests resilience can be understood as requiring an equal focus on systems which will prevent trauma (for example, keeping safe), as well adapting to the impact of or traumatic event.

This conceptual understanding of resilience through interaction between the individual and society is explored through the socio-ecological perspective of Ungar (2013). In considering the contextual relationship between resilience, trauma and culture, Ungar (2013) argues that rather than being an individual construct, resilience is an environmental quality that can nurture growth and resilience to trauma. What resilience 'looks like' varies between populations and cultures. In his view significant differences can be observed amongst groups that will determine the type of positive

interactions between the environment and an individual which a person might be sensitive to and which will have a bearing on their resilience (Ungar, 2013). For example, some minority communities may have well-developed cultures and practices which reduce the risk of trauma but which may be absent in the cultural values and processes of the majority community. This suggests that in some circumstances resilience may be time and place specific. Furthermore, the impact of a specific factor on individual resilience is critically determined by the extent to which the environment can limit exposure to and the impact of trauma.

Ungar's (2013) understanding suggests a (possibly unintended) synergy with the UK governments strategy for community resilience in which resilience to trauma (such as civic disasters) is seen in terms of localities drawing on existing networks and resources to respond to emergencies. Resilient communities are ones defined as being adaptive and able to sustain an "...acceptable level of function structure and identity" (Ungar, 2013) suggesting organisation and resources able to cope with the paradox of rapid change whilst retaining continuity. However, the extent to which communities are made up of individuals who may or may not be exposed to personal resilience through interaction with protective factors in their environment is not explored in the government's definition. Nor is the extent to which fair allocation of resources would be necessary in order to give all communities and their individual citizens equality of resilient opportunities.

The trend to understand resilience as primarily an environmental artefact can be observed in literature dealing with community responses to natural disasters and terrorism. For example, Norris et al., (2007) explores the resilience of communities in the face of disasters, whilst Walsh (2002) uses the concept to consider responses to the attacks of September 11, 2001. Indeed for some writers it appears that resilience is coterminous with disasters and terrorism. Whilst Aldrich and Meyer's (2015) analysis is also set within the field of civic disasters, they draw on social capital theory to direct attention away from physical infrastructure responses and towards more individualistic community-based social resources. On a more individual level McCann et al's., (2013) literature review of resilience in health and care professionals explores the concept in the face of pressure stemming from emotional, practice, and workload and management demands. They concur with Luthar et al., (2000) understanding of resilience as the capacity to maintain well-being in the face of stress and adversity.

In summary, there is a diversity of concepts which will help to understand resilience. Some are individualistic and some environmental or socio-ecological. Most have in common an understanding that resilience is more than recovery from trauma and the absence of symptoms for example post-traumatic stress disorder. Resilience means change and adaptation as a result of trauma. It may also include measures which prevent trauma from arising. Most would agree that resilience is more than coping or surviving. Against this somewhat divergent background Harms's (2015)

understanding of trauma and resilience as requiring an integrative conceptual approach appears most apposite to the evaluation discussed in this paper.

Harms (2015) discussion explores a range of conceptual frameworks that include psychodynamic, approaches socio-ecological understandings and anti-oppressive practice. As with all writers in the field she places resilience in the context of a response to some form of trauma. This might comprise a single incident or a chronic long-term series of experiences and may be accompanied by post-traumatic stress disorder. Harms (2015) acknowledges that the experience of trauma may be wider than a triggering event and that the impact of a response, for example in child protection, may be as traumatic as exposure to the initial event. This combination of event and response may lead towards a position where recovery from trauma that can be understood as a return to 'normal functioning' or everyday living. However Harms (2015) understands resilience as being more than just a return to the status quo, of coping with and surviving adversity. Instead resilience can be understood through "... positive adaptation in the face of adversity..." (Harms, 2015).

Harms (2015) integrative approach can be understood as a whole system's one. Themes of narratives of trauma, establishing safety and considering the environmental context, including the social, political economic and cultural context, are relevant in responding to trauma and promoting resilience adaptation. For Harms (2015), resilience involves change in the inner self and the way in which an individual interacts with the surroundings. However, an outer world dimension that extends from the individual, through their families into their communities and cultures, and the structural inequalities which may surround them, are equally relevant. Although resilience can be understood on the level of an individual responding to trauma through adaptation it requires a multidimensional approach that embraces the self and community.

This conceptualisation was relevant for the evaluation in a number of ways. It influenced the design of methodology where the participant narratives of individual experiences of trauma were explored in relation to personal change and adaptation, and the extent to which participants interacted differently with their families. Further insight was derived through the extent to which the environment of evaluation participant's, represented by the youth service, was able to provide interactions and resources that stimulated and consolidated adaptive individual resilience to acute and chronic trauma.

3. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative data collection methodology was utilised in order to gather evidence for the evaluation and was implemented in two phases. The first phase involved interviews with current and former apprentices using a semi-structured schedule designed to draw out experiences. Fifteen people were identified who are, or who had been, apprentices during 2010 – 2015. Of this group, eight people were interviewed who were available on the day of interview. Two people were current apprentices and six people had been apprentices between 2010 and 2015. Gender was evenly balanced.

The second phase comprised two focus groups which convened to reflect on interview results that had been summarised in a PowerPoint presentation. There was deliberately no formal analysis of data at this stage. Group A comprised four apprentices who agreed to assess the accuracy of findings and explore issues in greater depth. They were asked to reflect on the experience of the total apprenticeship group, as well as their own perspectives. Group B comprised five youth centre workers who commented on interview findings and added their own perspectives. The evaluation concluded with an interview with the youth centre Director. This provided the research team with an opportunity for further clarification and validation of evidence arising from interviews and focus groups.

In order to address these themes a series of key questions were devised, which were used to structure the evaluation methodology. These questions focused on the following areas: participants' views of the local community and how they came into contact with the youth centre; what the apprenticeship involved and what participants enjoyed the most; how the apprenticeship helped participants; and how the apprenticeship could be improved. The evaluation took place between September and November 2015. All interview data were anonymised.

4. PHASE 1 RESULTS: INTERVIEWS WITH CURRENT AND FORMER APPRENTICES.

Coming into contact with the youth centre

Most participants said they lived in an ethnically diverse community and the majority of people live in the local area. There were no concerns reported with long-term anti-social behaviour in their neighbourhoods or of tensions between communities or groups of different ethnicity. However, one participant described tensions within 'friendship groups' – groups of youngsters usually of the same gender who use the centre. It was noted that there were no problems with extreme or radical groups. However, the presence of the English Defence League was commented on by one participant.

All participants discussed the youth centre and the personal impact of the apprenticeship programme on people's lives. For most participants, there is long relationship with the youth centre as it is a presence in their community providing continuity. For participants who were not from the local community, the apprenticeship programme provided an opening into a career route where their skills and talents were valued and could develop. They also felt that the youth centre cared about their own personal development.

Participants described a strong sense of personal, practical and emotional support provided by the centre to youngsters who use the service. What was valued and which appears to be effective is that staff know and understand the children and families and what is happening in their lives. There was clear evidence in the accounts of apprentices of a centre ethos of care delivered by staff who were concerned for and supportive of them especially when family life was not working out very well. This ethos was evident when participants revealed key personal insights into their lives and their interaction with the youth centre. For some, these insights were relevant during the period of the apprenticeship. For others, they reflected long-term involvement with the centre.

However, there was clear evidence that the apprenticeship programme was critical in helping people turn life experiences which could be destructive into positive life outcomes and career skills. For example, one participants commented that being personally involved in offending (committing offences or seeing this behaviour in other people) provided experience that enabled work with young offenders, including an understanding of 'gang culture', offending and strategies to address these issues. Another participant talked how their own personal experiences of unhappiness, distress and breakdown in family relationships gave a unique insight into and capacity for understanding the lives and challenges faced by youngsters using the centre;

Participant involvement with the youth centre and the apprenticeship scheme

Some participants became involved with the youth centre through personal networking, which led to applying for an apprenticeship, or seeing an advertisement for an apprenticeship post. Others described a longer term relationship, moving from clubs and activities, to mentoring and the young leaders programme and then to becoming an apprentice.

For all participants, their engagement with the apprenticeship programme coincided with a journey through unhappy life events (for example, homelessness), and where participants had begun to think about 'turning their life around' and were looking for a chance to make this happen and help in making changes. Contact with youth centre staff coincided with this and produced a chemistry that comprised motivation to change, care and support. This appeared significant in helping people moving away from a cycle that could have been increasingly destructive, towards a different life path.

Participants reflections on the apprenticeship scheme: what worked well

A key element of the apprenticeship 'experience' was the 'social' aspect of working at the youth centre. The idea of team work, with everyone pulling in the same direction whilst individual learning was taking place was very important for the majority of participants. For most participants, there was a clear sense of purposeful and emotional belonging that extended to the work of the centre, their commitment to it, and their interaction with staff.

All participants commented on the importance of the apprenticeship scheme involving periods of time spent away from the local area. This allowed participants to meet other people from different nationalities and ethnicities, and seeing the world in a different way.

One participant noted that learning about the role of an apprentice and applying planning skills was helpful in dealing with the anxiety in relation to life generally and the stress of a new experience. A number of participants referred to planning; the idea that a worker might interact in a relaxed and informal way with youngsters but have a clear idea where that interaction was going.

Participants made regular and strong reference to confidence building. For most, this involved public speaking and developing communication skills. Residential events where there were positive learning encounters with other people were important in this process. Confidence building included developing time management and self discipline skills. The diversity of the apprenticeship work experiences, practical tasks, administrative work, direct work and responsibility with and for youngsters extended personal coping skills, which reached from work into people's private lives.

Trying new activities, but especially the role of mentoring and leadership with youngsters were critical in achievement. Together these experiences made participants feel more ambitious, flexible and goal-orientated. Accounts of the development of these career and life skills were allied with the growth of a passionate commitment to developing and delivering key skills, for example music or sport. This had led seeking opportunities in academic and career pathways.

For all apprentice evaluation participants', engagement with the programme represented a journey of developing resilience leading to outcomes that can be seen as life-changing, such as applying for a university degree, undertaking further education and employment. Whether these achievements might have been possible without engagement with youth centre staff can be debated. For each person a capacity for and willingness to achieve change was significant. What was clear from the evidence of apprentice participants was that the centre provided the necessary care and opportunities to realise this change.

In terms of improvement to the apprenticeship programme, recommendations were focused on recruiting more young leaders so there can be more apprenticeships; providing more work opportunities; additional tutor support and regular team meetings.

5. PHASE 2 RESULTS: FOCUS GROUP OUTCOMES.

The communities: how do people come into contact with the youth centre in the local community

Group A broadly held the view that their local communities were not ones with high levels of crime and disorder. They commented that a trend could be observed of children, who used to 'hang around' in their own locality, are now travelling to different areas. However, this did not hold true for all areas and the behaviour of children stealing bikes and then graduating to stealing cars and selling drugs could be observed. One participant referred to decanting a large social housing estate which had achieved the unintended outcome of dispersing offending behaviour across a wider community. Another participant referred to high levels of drug dealing in their local community. Further observations included the view that the immediate youth centre locality did not experience problems of offending, which might colour the perceptions of people who lived in close proximity to the centre.

Participants in both groups agreed with interview outcomes that interracial cultural or ethnic hostility was not a problem in the area and that some 'gangs' were racially mixed. Participants in group B were keen to stress the extent to which labelling a group of youngsters as a 'gang' was very contested and allowed older people to unfairly stereotype groups of younger people. This group agreed that tolerance by age groups represented by apprentices of what, in some communities would be considered antisocial behaviour, and was possibly quite high.

Both groups referred to problems within 'friendship' groups. Whilst Youth centre was good at purposefully identifying and working with such issues, the roots of these challenges could often be found in interaction between young people at school.

Contact with the youth centre

There was strong validation of interview findings that contact with the youth centre represented for many youngsters a long-term interaction. This was clear from the perspective of both groups: staff spoke passionately and with conviction of the importance of identifying troubled youngsters through their personal interaction with them and sticking with them through the ups and downs of often turbulent lives that could span a considerable amount of time. Group A stressed the importance of beginning activities when people are as young as possible and that imaginative and flexible activities with children from the age of six should be a starting point. Both groups endorsed the benefits of a recent activity involving an organisation providing services for 2 years and upwards within the youth centre.

Both groups took the opportunity to re-emphasise the importance of long-term family involvement and continuity with the youth centre. Relationships between staff and

children were seen as vital in this aim. Group A participants described clear personal benefits of these interactions, which had led to life-changing opportunities. Group B emphasised how this close personal contact, sometimes directly with the youngster or sometimes with youngsters through their peers, was an essential aspect of their work with children. It was also acknowledged that the youth centre provided important free or minimal cost¹ recreational activities, for example football, which children would have to pay for at other venues.

Group B participants provided crucial additional information about outreach activity that is relevant to the earlier discussion of youngsters stereotyped as gang members. Information about outreach work had not arisen during the first round of interviews where apprentice participants had been encouraged to explore their interactions within Youth centre rather than outside the centre. Outreach activity could be seen as having three elements. Firstly, as an engagement tool, building relationships with youngsters that might develop if they decided to take advantage of youth centre facilities, or which could continue if this movement did not take place. Secondly, outreach work might involve mediating in the local neighbourhood for example between retail businesses disturbed by youngsters from the youth centre congregating when activities had finished. This example was given as part of a wider strategy of 'community engagement'. Thirdly, strategies of working in estates where there were problems of antisocial behaviour or offending by providing outreach activities for youngsters. Underpinning these and probably other strategies was a principle of advocacy: "speaking up for children" whose views might otherwise not be heard. This included attending community council meetings.

Focus Group B participants emphasised the role played by social media in the lives of children. For some youngsters this is a major cause of conflict and unhappiness where issues in the community, including school, continue to be played out. Frustratingly, there was insufficient time within the group to explore the impact of this phenomenon.

Personal support from the youth centre

Both groups validated interview findings relevant to personal support. Participants in group B were keen to stress the importance of remaining constant with troubled youngsters and helping them through difficult times in their personal lives. This could include a spiritual element although one which it is hoped youngsters might be able to find for themselves rather than being delivered through a narrative which might be seen as 'evangelical'. This element of interaction appeared close to work which might take place with a youngster to help them develop and feel confident in a personal identity. The relevance of this approach concurred with the views of one participant of Group A who suggested that whilst faith and spiritual beliefs of the youth centre staff were not ones they personally identified with, the overall narrative of this participant was of life-changing engagement with the centre.

¹ A charge of 50p per session

Given the number of youngsters who attend the centre, both groups were asked to consider how vulnerable children are identified and how decisions were made about which children to 'stick with'. Both groups referred to a system of briefings or team meetings which are led by a club leader. During these meetings a previous session is reviewed and plans made for a forthcoming session. This includes deciding which youngsters they need to work more closely with alongside a 'who and what' strategy for achieving such aims. Progress is reviewed after each session. Group B participants emphasised the importance of being attuned to relationships between children, especially in the context of friendship groups. They were sensitive to the need to be aware of and make judgements about intervening when banter was moving to bullying.

Group A participants were able to explore in greater depth what helped them in their interaction with Youth centre and their journey through a young leader or apprenticeship programme. One person commented that their involvement with Youth centre had turned their weaknesses into strengths. Recognising patterns of behaviour in themselves helped them in working with others to recognise potentially negative patterns. There were key ingredients in this interaction that were echoed by both groups. These included empathy and the extent to which young people learn from what they see and hear, and the importance of modelling behaviour including recovery from unhappy life events. Group A participants had developed sophisticated strategies for sharing personal experiences without betraying their personal confidence or well-being. Group B participants referred to an 'engagement tool': it would have been useful to learn more about this.

Participants involvement with youth centre

Focus group discussions concurred with interview findings that a long-term relationship with the youth centre was a central ingredient. However this should not be considered the only route. Through discussion of outreach work, Group B participants indicated activity away from the centre was also crucial in engaging youngsters.

How the apprenticeship helped and the outcomes of being an apprentice

Many of the themes explored so far resurfaced in this group topic. The value of a long-term relationship based on trust and sticking with people was continually emphasised. Group B participants emphasised the importance of personal interaction and conversation with youngsters. Alongside their professional observations these interactions were key in developing openings to assess which children might be in need and what experiences they were going through. Interventions might include working with a young person's family as well as the young person. Group A participants took the opportunity to emphasise the importance of time spent away from the area as part of their apprenticeship. These experiences built relationships which continue and helped to facilitate seeing the world through a different perspective.

Improvements to the apprenticeship programme

Group A participants were asked to consider in greater detail what could be improved as a result of their apprenticeship experience. They suggested more leadership opportunities and a clearer remit for their role and responsibilities. One participant spoke with frustration in relation to planning an activity only to be told by a club leader that this would not be possible. Concerns and queries about NVQ tutoring were repeated although participants also commented that the quality of the input had improved. Group B participants impressed as being pleased with the feedback surrounding the personal learning and development which took place during young leaders and apprenticeships programmes. One concern indicating a potential area improvement was that apprentices might experience a loss of focus and momentum when their apprenticeship concluded.

6 DISCUSSION

The Youth centre and the apprenticeship programme

The work of the youth centre is founded on a framework of promoting the health and wellbeing of children through positive engagement and preparing them for education and employment. The evaluation findings evidenced this is underpinned by a tangible and empathic ethos of long term support and engagement with children and young adults many of whom encounter significant personal and environmental challenges, including offending, mental ill-health and family disruption. The life experiences of apprentices whose narratives underpinned the evaluation evidence exemplified these and other themes. However, individual interaction with the youth centre does not always produce immediate and measurable outcomes. This points towards the centre's philosophy of 'sticking with people' encountering a destructive cycle of circumstances and behaviour as a key ingredient in children and young adults developing resilience to challenges, which might otherwise see them overwhelmed by adversity.

Achieving this resilience was evidenced in new ways of living, characterised by life-changing achievement including accessing higher education or professional employment. Given the alternative life pathways that can be predicted, for example long term and costly engagement and dependency on the state, the youth centre's interaction with apprentices can be seen as representing excellent value for money. This was clearly evidenced in personal outcomes for interview participants where the apprenticeship programme was a central factor in developing and realising aspirations.

On a more individual level, interview and focus group findings revealed the extent to which successfully completing an apprenticeship represented different pathways on a journey of growing resilience. Although 15 people successfully completed the programme, their starting points were diverse. For some, seeing an apprenticeship advertisement was, on the surface, a straightforward business of applying for a post. For others even arriving at the point of beginning their apprenticeship and then going on to realise life-changing opportunities represented a long and difficult journey through adverse life events. Their achievement of even arriving at day one of their apprenticeship should not be underestimated.

There was clear and sustained evidence that the youth centre adopts a caring and nurturing position in relation to the children it works with. The reflection, time, commitment and activity which underpins the delivery of care and support would be difficult to capture in performance management data. However it was valued by interview participants who provided clear evidence of the approach being significant in efforts to achieve change in the lives. Such a strategy is time consuming and may not produce evidence of immediate outcomes. However the value of 'sticking with people as a mainstay of interaction was clearly evidenced in the narratives of participants and their personal outcomes. Such a strategy may produce a mismatch

between the need to sustain youngsters struggling with difficult life events and the requirement to produce evidence of clear and more immediate outcomes. Consideration could be given to developing a data collection system that would capture information about youngsters in this vulnerable group. This information may be of use to existing funders and may be relevant to future funding applications.

Developing the apprenticeship programme

More fundamentally, consideration should be given to expanding and enhancing the apprenticeship programme. Based on the evidence of this evaluation this could be achieved through two strategic objectives: a) Increasing the number of apprentices, and, b) developing the programme to operate on a three-year basis. Both objectives acknowledge the youth centre ethos of valuing the knowledge, skills and expertise of children who live in their locality, about their locality. Children are in many ways unacknowledged experts on the realities of dealing with contemporary urban life but their voices and ideas are seldom sought and articulated. Youth centre staff already have sound experience of advocating for and representing the views of youngsters. Both suggest objectives would provide a development opportunity not merely in relation to advocacy but in acknowledging and developing the skills and capacities of children and young adults. Both objectives recognise the growing presence of 'new professionals': people, who range from service users and carers to active citizens, and who can be observed as stepping into spaces to organise services and support for their communities in ways which were previously the province of statutory agencies.

Outreach Work

Irrespective of developing the apprenticeship programme along such lines, it may be useful to consider the balance between activities based at the youth centre and outreach work. Based on the evidence of interview and focus group participants, the localities the centre serves continues to reflect the youth centre ethos of meeting the needs of children living in deprived areas. Whilst focus group participants referred to a developing process of 'gentrification' that may reflect wider demographic change in London, it is also the case that the locality is dominated by social housing stock. Any trend of 'gentrification' may be superficial and should not be allowed to mask evidence of enduring poverty. The ward where the centre is located sits minutes away by foot from one of the 5% most deprived localities in the UK. However it will be important to keep socio-demographic changes under review to ensure that the youth centre's remit does not drift from its long term focus. Outreach work is likely to be a critical factor in such a process.

Focus group participants referred to young people becoming increasingly mobile and spending more time away from their immediate localities when not at home. Outreach work may be a useful way of developing engagement with increasingly mobile

youngsters and involving them in the youth centre's lead activities. Given this, there is a clear argument for engaging future apprentices in outreach work.

Evaluation participants had observed that groups of children who might be seen as gang members (noting the need to avoid such stereotypes) were becoming more mobile in terms of the locality where they engage in street life and appeared more homogenous in relation to race. It was also noted that young females were becoming more active in the supply of illicit drugs possibly because their presentation was perceived as less intimidating by males. Consideration should be given to the impact these observations might have on the work of the centre. Outreach work may be a useful way of exploring and assessing any impact, but consideration should be given to the gender balance in providing such a service.

There was clear endorsement for developing and expanding the young leaders programme both as an experience in its own right and as an opening to apprenticeships. The evidence of interviews and focus groups argues the programme represents excellent value for money in relation to staff time investment. It provides youngsters with the opportunity to learn and apply leadership skills (for example planning, communication, time management) whilst providing services for children. Given the Youth centre model of working and underpinning ethos, there are significant opportunities to develop the young leaders programme on a peer mentoring basis. If outreach work is developed by including young leaders and apprentices then consideration should be given, if not already present, to including conflict resolution and mediation strategies within the learning programme.